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HYGIENE OF THE HOUSEHOLD

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WE will now glance at the living-room, or general sitting-room of the family,—essentially a room for use, not for show.

Have you ever noticed that on entering a room the first thing that attracts your eyes is the open fireplace—when there happens to be one? Some writer has remarked that a landscape without water is like a face without eyes, and we may rightly add that a fire in a room is like bright eyes in a face. It is, indeed, a luxury that is almost a necessity in winter, not only for warmth and ventilation, but for the good moral effect it has on our spirits in the “dark days” that are found in every life.

How restful to mind and body is the cosy twilight talk, sociable cup of tea, or quiet day-dream beside the open fire. Of course, a fire involves extra care, but anything that is worth having is worth taking some trouble about, so let us have our cheery friend, the grate fire.

Gas-logs, now so much in vogue, certainly give less trouble, but are not so healthy, and at best are a poor substitute for the real thing, which is so truly, as Lowell poetically describes it:

“Beauty on my hearth-stone blazing,
While thou leapest fast and faster,
Wild with self-delighted glee,
Or sink'st low and glowest faintly,
As an aureole still and saintly,
For thou hast magic beyond wine,
To unlock natures each to each;
Thou fill'st the pauses of the speech
With whispers that to dreamland reach.”

Hard-wood or veneered floor,—the latter cheaper and equally durable,—with perhaps one large rug to cover the centre of the room, I again endorse as the best floor-covering for the living-room.

A word about bric-a-brac and pictures: Don't display all your treasures at the same time. The Japanese have an admirable custom of allowing only one handsome vase or rare curio to be seen on their tables at a time, thus bringing out all its artistic beauties and focussing them on the mind's eye. I have heard lately about a lady who has had the good sense to follow out this idea by locking away half her curios and art treasures, and every few months she is enabled to change the entire

appearance of her rooms by bringing out the “hidden treasures” and putting away what has been in use, thus giving an interesting fresh look to her rooms for which her relatives and friends render her grateful thanks.

There is no rest to mind or body in a room that is so crowded, even with the most exquisite things, that one is continually reminded of an old curiosity shop. The same thought applies to the furniture; better, far, have your room scantily furnished than so cumbered that one cannot move without being in danger of upsetting something.

Heavily upholstered furniture and plush and chenille hangings are among the things to be avoided from a hygienic as well as an artistic point of view. Soft silks, art muslins, denim, or some of the many rich Oriental hangings and coverings are preferable. French Madras, that is made now in such charming designs in the most exquisite shades, not expensive, is very effective for window drapery, and, by the way, soft half-tones in color are taking the place of pure white in the window-curtains of many aristocratic homes.

Let me beg of you not to dress up your windows in half a dozen different garments; curtains should frame the window, not conceal it, allowing room for the entrance of sunlight and fresh air.

The living-room is for daily use and comfort, so let us have comfortable furniture, as handsome as you please, but chairs that you may rest in, and cushions that you are not afraid to put your head upon.

A newly married man, starting housekeeping, told his wife that he did not mind how she furnished the rooms as long as she followed out the idea that nothing she bought was to be too good for daily use and comfort.

I have entered rooms arrayed in such a stiff “touch not, handle not” style that all one’s warmth of feeling shrivels up, and the word home or living-room is an anomaly.

Have your reception-room as stately and as much for show as you desire,—if you do desire such a thing,—but let the general sitting-room be a living-room in every sense of the word, showing the different sides of the home life, and, above all, a room of refreshment to mind and body.

A few good pictures, plenty of light, air, and sunshine, growing plants, book-shelves filled by favorite authors containing “medicine for the soul,” a good-sized centre-table for magazines and papers, writing-desk fully equipped, Morris chair, lounge, piano, and some few of the household gods dear to the heart of every family, and all surrounded by an atmosphere of cleanliness only procured by broom, soap, and water,—such a room arranged according to individual taste will be a

real home nest, where "the anxious cares of the day may fold their tents like the Arabs, and silently steal away."

There is a great tendency to keep the "best" room shut up in gloomy darkness two-thirds of the time. This error is to be found especially among the country folks, and when visiting there you are sometimes ushered into a room so cold, dark, and musty that you might as well be in an underground chamber.

A well-known writer compares the life of a lonely, reserved, unattractive woman to a "house whose parlors have always been closed," showing so clearly the absence of life, warmth, and sympathy which is expressed by the closed-up room. A young woman who had been studying abroad for some years on returning to her New England home found the hardest thing she had to meet was the shut-up parlor, sacred only to the memory of funerals and weddings. "Let's open the parlor and have a fire and afternoon tea?" she asked her mother. "Not for ourselves!" exclaimed her mother, holding up her hands in amazement. But one day when the girl was ill and sad the mother went out, bought a large roll of oil-cloth, spread it over the velvet carpet, built a small fire in the grate, and allowed a ray of light to enter one of the windows, showing by these small concessions the mother's heart rising above her life-long traditions.

Even if the parlor is not in daily use, open the windows and doors and let in fresh air, sun, and flowers; and don't be afraid of a little trace of life in the shape of an open book, cushion out of place, child's toy on the floor, or a ray of sunshine across the room. Much more lovable and attractive is a room showing some of the wear and tear of life, and thereby expressing the personality of its owner, than one that is only opened for state occasions and oppresses you with the thought that you are only received on the threshold, not into the home, of the family.

You can never make the mistake of having too many growing plants and cut flowers around the house. They always elevate our thoughts to a higher sphere, and a beautiful flower has the same good moral effect on our lives as a bright ray of sunshine.

If there is a member of the family who is a semi-invalid and obliged to be classed among the "shut-ins" during the severe weather, surround her with growing plants which need her loving care daily, and, if possible, have a few cut flowers always on her table, and the unconscious influence which permeates from Nature's children will wind itself around her life, draw her thoughts from her own troubles, and cheer the dark hours.